

Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
SW1A 2NS

25 August 2016

Dear Jeremy,

Since David Cameron unveiled the manifesto commitment in 2015 of achieving a “truly seven-day NHS” by the end of this parliament, the BMA has consistently stated our support for better patient care across every day of the week.

The BMA has also been consistent in asking to see the plan detailing how this expansion of services would be funded and delivered. Over the past year, the BMA has been asking where the additional staff and the additional tens of billions of pounds required would come from, and how current NHS services would be protected, not overstretched and damaged.

In the meantime, general practitioners have had additional seven-day access thrust upon them at a time when unprecedented increases in demand are already debilitating a workforce struggling to cope with delivering current services. Where extended access has been provided, patient demand has often been at levels far too low to keep services viable.

Hospital consultants have been accused of not working weekends, their employment contract branded as being the barrier to seven-day services, yet consultants know that they are in hospitals caring for patients every day and night of the week. Junior doctors have been given no option other than to take unprecedented industrial action as a last resort to resist the imposition of a contract you wrongfully claim is about seven-day services, but which they know is aimed at making it cheaper to employ doctors at weekends.

In order to justify the need for this policy, you have consistently used misleading statistics and research, then vilified and branded as “roadblocks” those who questioned this blatant misuse of evidence, both in parliament and the press. This week’s revelations about the department of health’s risk register throw all this into a new light. Those of us who have been pressing the government for the detail of a plan before embarking on a change of this magnitude, potentially

Chief executive: Keith Ward

Registered as a Company limited by Guarantee. Registered No. 8848 England.
Registered office: BMA House, Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9JP.
Listed as a Trade Union under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974.



putting current levels of weekday and weekend services and patient care at risk, have now been vindicated.

The BMA remains committed to the delivery of better patient care across the week and in this spirit, I now ask you to develop the detailed plan for which we have been asking, working in collaboration with doctors and other healthcare staff: the very people already delivering patient care across seven days. As a prerequisite, this plan will need to set out how the government will ensure the necessary funding and staffing for this extension of services at a time when the NHS is already struggling to cope with demand. In the absence of such a plan, it is not possible for this proposal to have any credibility with the profession or the public.

While the Social Partnership Forum will be helpful in considering and monitoring the impact of seven-day services on the workforce, we are yet to receive any further information about the group advising NHS England on overarching policy direction of which, we had been assured, the BMA would be a member,

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Porter." The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr Mark Porter
BMA council chair